

McCombs - h. 162.
APRIL 1922

THE SOUTHERN WORKMAN

Virginia and Negro Health

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If Lincoln Came to Hampton *X*

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IF LINCOLN CAME TO HAMPTON*

BY FRANCIS G. PEABODY

HOW fortunate the friends of Hampton are that they can meet and listen to these touching "Spirituals" on the birthday of Abraham Lincoln; for who is there among American citizens who should be so deeply stirred to gratitude and praise as the people of the colored race? "Oh, freedom!"—we have just heard—"Oh, freedom! Before I'd be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be free." It is a cry from the heart of the slave as he suffered all the ignominy of servitude. Rather than this, he would be buried in his grave, and go home to his Lord and be free. I venture to recall, also, the fact that this old Chapel in which we meet is worthy of the cause which brings us together. One of the earliest reminiscences of my own childhood is of remaining here one Sunday, by my mother's knee, during the Communion Service, and seeing a black man, a runaway slave, who was a familiar visitor in my own home, coming slowly up the side aisle, after the "white folks" had partaken of the Lord's supper, and kneeling at the chancel rail to receive the bread and wine, as though he had heard the great words, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

Lincoln's convictions about slavery were lifelong and undisguised. As early as 1842, when he was about thirty-three years of age, he wrote, "I have just told the fellows in Springfield that the one victory which we can call complete will be when there is not one slave or one drunkard on God's green earth"; and again, as late as 1864, when the tragedy of his own death was near, he looked back on his whole career and said, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel." This unwavering and continuous conviction was, however, matched by his extraordinary gift of patience. Definitely as he was determined that slavery should be abolished, he was not less determined that the great transition should be made at the right time and in the right way. It was this patience of Lincoln that led one precipitate reformer to accuse him of abandoning the cause of abolition, and to describe him as the "slave-hound from Illinois." Twice Lincoln proposed to the slaveholders emancipation with compensation, but the first time only two members of his Cabinet supported him, and the second time, only one. Finally, in the Proclamation of January 1, 1863,

* An address at a Hampton meeting in Boston on Lincoln Day, 1922

and in the Second Inaugural, the great decision was announced, in words that will live forever: "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled up by the bondsman's three hundred years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said: 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'" Such was the unyielding and persistent, yet solitary and patient, determination which delivered our country from its greatest curse. Such was, as Lowell said in his Commemoration Ode:—

"The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American."

What could be done, Lincoln must have asked himself, for this backward and disheartened race which thus found itself suddenly confronted by the duties and dangers of citizenship? There could be but one answer to that question. They must be met just where they were, with their peculiar gifts of teachableness, loyalty, simplicity, and piety, and slowly educated into self-respect, persistency, energy, initiative, and citizenship. "A country that was not safe with ignorant slaves," Booker Washington later said, "could not be safe with ignorant freedmen." Education must be adapted to the special conditions of the race. It must be, first, of the hand, to teach the way to work; and then of the head, to teach the way to think; and then of the heart, to teach the way to trust and wait. Such was the plan which, as Lincoln said of Emancipation itself, was plain, peaceful, generous, just, a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud and God will forever bless."

Then, by the same guiding Providence which raised up Abraham Lincoln to free an enslaved race, Samuel Armstrong was raised up to begin their further emancipation from the slavery of ignorance. The first attempt to cope with the huge problem of Negro helplessness was in the organization, under General Howard, of the Freedmen's Bureau, and through the service of the Freedmen's Bureau, Armstrong, fresh from the war, with the courage of a soldier and the heart of a missionary, was led to establish his struggling school at Hampton. "The thing to be done," he said, "was clear—to train selected youths who should go out and teach and lead their people. * * ; to teach respect for labor * * and in this way to build up an industrial system, for the sake, not only of self-support and intelligent labor, but also for the sake of character." Here was the historical chronology of

these great events: Emancipation, Protection, Education; this was the spiritual genealogy—Lincoln, Howard, Armstrong.

Abraham Lincoln did not live to see the harvest of his hopes. As was written of the great men of Israel, he died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen and greeted them from afar. But suppose that, after fifty years, the spirit of the great Emancipator should survey the condition of the race whose freedom he secured, what would he say of its progress and its promise? He would, no doubt, be shocked by the still surviving evidences of racial prejudice, outrages committed, and rights denied. But, on the other hand, surveying the race as a whole, would he not see in its advance in a half-century, from dependence and improvidence to self-support and self-respect, one of the most notable miracles in the social history of the world? Most reassuring of all to the discerning eye of Lincoln would be the acceptance by the best minds of the white race in the Southern States of the welfare of the Negro race as an essential part of social stability and economic strength. "Ignorance," one of the wisest of such Southerners, Dr. Curry, said, "is not a remedy for anything." "The only hope for the future of the South," General Armstrong himself taught, "is to lift the colored race by practical education which shall fit them for life."

Or suppose, once more, that Abraham Lincoln were now to look for a concrete illustration of this racial progress, where would he turn? Some years ago, a striking little book appeared, with the title, "If Christ came to Chicago?" Suppose we ask ourselves the corresponding question, "If Lincoln came to Hampton?" Here, just after his death, was established a little school, without resources or public confidence, like a little flame lit by the fiery nature of Armstrong. What would Lincoln find after fifty years? He would find a great beacon-light, shining across the South, showing to thousands the way of efficient service. He would see that the educational principles which Armstrong laid down for the training of the hand and head and heart had not only inspired the work of a long list of other schools in this country, but had radiated out with its illumination to encourage schools in India, China, and Africa. "It seems to fall to Hampton," said the head of a school in Saloniki, "to teach the nations of Europe the dignity of labor." And what would Lincoln find after fifty years, as the fruit of that generosity which established Hampton. He would find that the resources of the school had increased from nothing to an annual budget of more than \$400,000, and an invested endowment of more than \$4,000,000. And what would he observe of the moral atmosphere and spiritual climate, which is the real test of vitality of such a work? He would find that peculiar merging of consecration with happiness

which every visitor recognizes as the Hampton spirit: a glad and generous companionship which brings together the best of three races in the common privilege of training for life, and which led one aged colored woman to say to a Hampton teacher, "To be sure, honey, you've got a white face, but, praise de Lord, you've got a black heart."

If, finally, it were within these last few weeks that Lincoln had come to Hampton, he would witness one other transition which is of extreme significance for the future of the colored race. The progress of Negro education has become so marked, and the demand for better-trained teachers so general, that Hampton, which has from the beginning emphasized industrial education, must now face the other way also and expand its academic opportunity. It must, as always, keep its feet on the ground, but it must look up more resolutely to the heights. In short, there is to be an equal chance given at Hampton for the training of farmers and artisans, and for the preparation of young men and young women who wish to become high-school teachers or principals or to start on their way to college. Such an expansion involves a serious addition to the budget of the school; but it is welcomed there as an answer to a real demand, made by white commissioners of education at the South, that no opportunity shall be denied their colored fellow-citizens, and that the teachers of that race shall meet the same tests as the whitest of their fellow-citizens.

Such is the work which each year makes its appeal to Northern friends. Hampton is always poor, as any well-conducted school ought to be; but it is very rich in the loyalty of its supporters, and it is making both ends meet more completely than is common in these trying days. Every new dollar that it now receives is to be applied, not to paying debts or reducing deficits, but to the direct expansion of its service, and the lifting of the level of opportunity and efficiency for a race which has patiently borne its burden in time of peace, and bravely fought for its country in time of war. If, then, Abraham Lincoln could look to-day across this brief space of fifty years, would he not be glad to have his birthday kept by promoting and reinforcing the work of Hampton? Might he not say to its friends to-day, as he once said, in words which the *London Times* called the most sublime State Paper of the century and which exactly four months after they were spoken were read over his grave, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in." That is precisely what Hampton, with charity and firmness, without malice or controversy, is trying, year by year, to do.

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